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EVANGELISM OF THE YOUTH

— OR —

THE SUPREME OBJECTIVE IN
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

by

ROY C. HELFENSTEIN



BOOKLET—TEN

“DEPARTMENT OF EVANGELISM AND
LIFE SERVICE”

of the
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Room 23 C. P. A. Bldg.

Dayton. Ohio

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FOREWORD

By Dr. Chas. L. Goodell

It would be difficult to conceive of a greater misunderstanding of the principles of Christian training than to represent Evangelism and Religious Education as opposed to each other. Religious Education, as the author of this pamphlet states, is simply one of the methods of evangelism, and unless religious education is permeated with the spirit of the evangel it will eventuate in nothing but a cold intellectualism which is as far as possible removed from the spirit of the Christian life.

The trouble with much of our Sunday-school training has been that it concerned itself only with the form of things. It did not eventuate in Christian character. It is well for every teacher and parent to ask, "What is the end of my work of instruction?" Is it to impart a few facts, to memorize historical data and literary products, or is it to interpret the facts and evaluate the literature studied in order to discover their spiritual content and apply the things we learn to the growth of the soul? To train the mind and not the soul is to do too much business with your capital; it leads to moral bankruptcy.

The latest figures from Dr. Athearn's survey of Indiana show that there are more scholars in the Sunday-school at the age of eleven than at any other time. Seventy-five percent of them have left the Church and Sunday-school before they are eighteen. This shows that we must train our children in love

FOREWORD

for the things of God, in appreciation of the call of duty, in spiritual ideals and helpful service, so that they will not turn from the Church at the first opportunity. Mere historical knowledge of the Bible, what its books are, when they were written and by whom, has little to do with the spiritual lessons which are hidden there. "The world by wisdom knows not God." The Pharisees were past-masters in the knowledge of the law and the prophets, but what good came of it? Jesus said: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

The spirit of the evangel must be in the heart of the teacher, otherwise religious training will be a dry and sterile thing. "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." So said the great Teacher and our teaching will be of value only as it eventuates in life. This fact Dr. Helfenstein emphasizes in this excellent article and I believe its wide circulation will do much good.

CHAS. L. GOODELL,

Executive Secretary.

Commission on Evangelism and Life Service of the
Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.

EVANGELISM OF THE YOUTH

— OR —

THE SUPREME OBJECTIVE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

It is extremely unfortunate that the term "Evangelism" has so often been used as being synonymous with "Revivalism." The two terms are not synonymous. Because of the failure on the part of many to appreciate the fact that revivalism is but one of the many methods of evangelism, the work of evangelism in its larger scope has been made to suffer. But no church can afford to under-estimate the importance of evangelism, which is the initial work of the church of our Lord,—the winning of people to Christ and Kingdom service. Evangelism is the recruiting work of the church. Revivalism is in fact simply a radical and last resort method of evangelism. As important as the revival has been in the past, and as large a place as it has held in the life of the church, the emphasis that has been laid upon this method of evangelism in the interest of winning adults to Christ has largely overshadowed the more important type of evangelism—Educational Evangelism, which seeks to win the youth to Christ. The revival will no doubt still have a place in the program of many churches, but the churches that look farther into the future will place the main emphasis upon educational evangelism, for it

seeks to save the life for humanity as well as to save the soul for God.

Evangelism of the youth or educational evangelism has always been the greatest opportunity of the church. But it has never been sufficiently appreciated. It is not a new type of evangelism. Jesus recognized the importance of the child in the Kingdom, and down through the years the pastors who have appreciated the opportunity of winning the child to Christ and the church have rendered the largest service to the Kingdom of God.

From the beginning, the Church has made more or less use of what is known as educational evangelism. This method of evangelism is the recognition of the capacity of the child to respond to religious stimuli, and to exercise faith in God. It is a systematic attempt to instruct the child in the knowledge of God and of His will for boys and girls, and to secure their allegiance to the cause of right living,—to make them conscious of Christ as an unseen but ever present friend to whom they may talk in prayer, and who can help them in their school life, in their play life, and in their work. Educational evangelism is the conscious effort on the part of the church to make the church life so inviting, and religion so real and so appealing to the youth that they will be anxious to embrace religion and identify themselves with the church. Educational evangelism has as its one objective the winning of the youth for Jesus Christ and His church. The means to this end is religious instruction in the

home, and in the Sunday-school, and when possible in the public school. It would be better to say that the means to this end is religious instruction plus religious example.

I repeat the statement,—educational evangelism is not a new type of evangelism, though its possibilities have never been fully realized. For some reason it has always been crowded into the background to make way for what is commonly termed,—inspirational or adult evangelism. And this has meant an irreparable loss to the church. No doubt the new emphasis which is now being placed upon educational evangelism, *Evangelism of the youth*, is due to a larger knowledge of child psychology, and a larger appreciation of child life. We have come to realize that as Jesus declared the Kingdom of God belongs to the child, so all the interests of life should be directed for the child's self realization and welfare. We have come to look upon the child as an asset to society, realizing that if he becomes a liability it is the fault of either the parents or the church or the school or of all. If any child becomes a liability, if any child goes wrong it is the fault of society *somewhere*. Children are what adults make them. Of course there are exceptions to all rules, and sometimes it seems as if a child is immune to and a contradiction of all laws of heredity, environment, and opportunity. But such is the exception. The rule is that a child is what his home life, his school life, his church life, and his community life make him. Because of this larger appreciation of the responsi-

lity that *society* in general feels toward the youth, the church more keenly recognizes its responsibility and its opportunity in winning the youth to definite allegiance to Christ.

Society is making larger provision for increasing the so called secular knowledge of the youth, and the church universal is recognizing the need of giving religious content to this increased fund of knowledge that society is bequeathing to the child.

Knowledge is power. But power itself is not an unqualified good. Knowledge is power—power either for good or for evil—power to tear down the Kingdom of God or power to build up the Kingdom of God. Modern society is giving the youth a larger knowledge of the world in which they live—a larger knowledge of things and their forces, a larger knowledge of men and their ways—a larger knowledge of their individual capacities and possibilities. That is what our public schools are doing for our youth. And we thank God for it. But this larger contribution of so called secular knowledge imposes a tremendous responsibility upon the church of Jesus Christ to see to it that the youth shall also receive a larger knowledge of God and His will, for knowledge of life and of the world touched by knowledge of God and His love makes the total fund of knowledge a power for God and for human good.

Secular education challenges the child to look out upon the world in which he lives. Religious education

challenges the child, after looking out upon the world, to look up to the God who is the Creator of it all, and whose existence and sovereignty alone gives meaning to life. Evangelism by religious education seeks to impress upon the youth the fact that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof"—and that our lives belong to Him. And the youth is put upon his honor in responding to the proposition,—“Is it right to live in God's world, breathe God's air, and enjoy all the benefits of God's providence and then refuse to use one's life in His service?”

The supreme opportunity of the Church of Jesus Christ today lies in an adequate program of religious education that has a definite *Evangelistic objective*. Time was when religious workers spoke of religious education as being one method of Kingdom service—the normal method, and evangelism was spoken of as being altogether distinct from religious education, evangelism being considered an abnormal method of Kingdom service. One educationist has spoken of evangelism as being the “mopping-up work of the church.” Such notions only come from a wrong understanding of the meaning of Evangelism—confusing the term “evangelism” with “revivalism.” Evangelism, we should repeat again and again, is the initial work of the church—the winning of the personal allegiance of boys and girls and men and women to Jesus Christ and His church. The winning may be done by religious education as well as by the revival

meeting. If the educationist referred to a moment ago had spoken of "*revivalism*" as being the *mopping up* work of the church, his metaphor might have been within the bounds of fact. The revival often, to say the most for it, is the cleaning up work of the church—a task that would not have been necessary if the church and the home had lived up to their high privilege of giving Christian nurture all through the years. If adults had been truly won to Christ when they were children, it would not be necessary to win them again when they reached maturity.

But in the past we have not given educational evangelism a real chance. We have laid our major emphasis upon adult evangelism, or inspirational evangelism. The church is now demanding first things first. The child has again been "set in the midst." And the most hopeful outlook for the church of Jesus Christ today is the fact that everywhere the evangelism of youth, or educational evangelism, is coming into greater favor, and that in the future it will receive the major emphasis, and adult evangelism will be given secondary consideration.

For more than four hundred years Protestantism has been depending largely upon adult evangelism for recruiting the church membership. The church has been looked upon as a wrecking crew instead of a track inspection and track repair crew. It has labored too much under the impression that its business was to clean up the wrecks that sin had caused—to save people after they had first gone to the devil. But

educational evangelism insists that the business of the church is to inspect the track of modern life and keep it in such a state of repair, with guards at the switches and signals at all danger points so as to prevent moral wrecks. In other words, educational evangelism demands that the child shall be saved to God and for His service before it goes to the devil. Educational evangelism believes in the work of the *good Samaritan* who renders due service to the man who has fallen in a life of sin and shame. But it believes more in the *Better Samaritan* who clears and lights the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho so as to make traveling safe—and if need be to police the road of life with moral influences so that the character of every boy and girl will be safe. The *Better Samaritan* is the need of the hour. And the church with a vision of the possibilities in educational evangelism is the *Better Samaritan* in modern life.

Notwithstanding that Protestant churches are taking in more members each year than in any previous year, still we must face the stubborn and unpleasant fact that this increase has not kept pace with the increase of population. There may be more church members in the U. S. in this good year of our Lord 1924 than there were in 1923. But there are also more unbelievers, more non-Christians than there were last year, and the percentage of increase tips the balance in favor of the unbelievers, as unpleasant and as uninviting as that fact may be. The percentage of increase in church membership has not been equal to

the increase in population. We dare not play the part of the foolish ostrich and blind ourselves to this danger which is nothing less than perilous, unless we change our tactics and policies of warfare against sin and unbelief.

If the world is to be won for Christ, it can only be done by winning the youth. For more than four hundred years Protestantism has tried to recruit the Kingdom forces largely by adult evangelism, and while the membership of the churches has increased—the army of unbelievers has increased at even a more rapid rate. Something must be done to give the church the advantage—to turn the tide of increase in favor of righteousness and in favor of our God. We will need to continue our adult evangelism, perhaps always—but we will positively have to lay our major emphasis upon the evangelism of youth, and win the boys and girls for God if the Kingdoms of this world are to become the Kingdom of our Lord Christ.

“To win an adult to Christ you save a soul. To win a child you save a soul plus a life.” Adult evangelism or inspirational evangelism should not be supplanted by child evangelism, or by what is usually called educational evangelism. But rather child evangelism should receive the major emphasis, and the same should be supplemented by adult evangelism. In the past we have reversed the order, and placed the major emphasis on inspirational or adult evangelism. In the future the churches will correct the mistake and place the major emphasis on child evangelism, and then there will be less demand for adult evangelism.

In the past many have thought that the child might be qualified to make other important choices in life, but that choosing Christ demanded more mature judgment and that therefore it was wrong to *encourage* or to try to persuade children to decide for Christ and the church. How many of us have heard parents actually oppose their children confessing Christ and uniting with the Church! Such parents insist that a boy or girl of ten or twelve years of age does not realize all that accepting Christ and joining the church means. *But neither does an adult.* The child does not have to be able to explain all the mysteries of religion in order to be religious. If such a test were demanded of adults not one could meet the test. No man or woman living knows all the mysteries of religion. But even the child of eight years can know enough to experience religion. How inconsistent such parents are to oppose their children in becoming Christians on the ground the child does not understand all it means. The child does not understand the mystery of sleep. Will the parent therefore keep the child awake until it learns the mystery of sleep? The child does not understand the mystery of the process of digestion. Will the parent therefore refuse to let the child eat until it learns all about the process of digestion and assimilation? The child does not understand the mystery of thought, the law of the association of ideas. Will the parent therefore forbid the child to think until it learns the mystery of thought. The child does not understand the mystery of love. Will the parent therefore forbid the child to exercise love for home and parents until it is able to

comprehend the meaning of it all? Why then should a parent refuse to let a child profess religion until he can fully understand the meaning of religion? The children themselves and the Kingdom of God have had to suffer because of the inconsistent attitude of parents who failed to appreciate the naturalness of religion and the capacity of the child for religious experience.

Ten years ago the psychologists told us that the age from twelve to sixteen was the period in which the child is most responsive to religious stimuli. But the actual experience of life has revealed that those early deductions of Starbuck, Ames, Hall, and others are wrong. During the years between eight and twelve, the child is in the most tender and impressionable period of its life. That is the time of all times when the current of the child's thoughts and life can most easily be turned Godward. Educationists recognize that this is the best time in the child's life to learn music, art, and the languages. They should also recognize that this is the best time in the child's life for it to learn God, and the way of righteousness or right living.

Occasionally, you will find parents who are somewhat advanced beyond the position of those who oppose their children making religious decisions, but who still fall short of God's expectation of every believing parent. This class of parents to whom I refer might be called the "middle of the roaders." They do not oppose their children making confession of

Christ and uniting with the church, but neither do they encourage it. When approached on the question they reply, "Yes, I want my boy (or girl) to be a Christian and I shall be very glad when they make up their mind of their own record. But I do not think it is right to try to influence them. I want them to decide for themselves." God in heaven have mercy upon us if we parents feel that we should not try to influence our children for Christ and the church from their very earliest childhood! There are plenty of forces in the world trying to influence them away from Christ and the church. And if the parents fail to influence their children for Christ and the church, who pray, can ever atone for their neglect?

Jesus said—"Suffer the children to come unto me, and forbid them not." In other words "encourage the children to come unto me." *Encourage, lead, direct.* That is the Christian parent's responsibility to the child, to society, and to God. What right has a Christian parent to expect the best from his child if he is so busy here and there with the lesser interests that he fails to provide for the spiritual nurture of his own offspring? Many a parent to their eternal regret have been busy here and there, neglecting the moral and spiritual interests of the child until it was too late and when they realized their mistake the child was gone from their influence.

One of the primary duties of every Christian mother is to teach her child to pray. One of the happiest times in a mother's and father's life is the expe-

rience of teaching their child to pray. And yet there are hundreds of professing Christian parents who absolutely fall down in this responsibility,—Christian parents who are neglecting to teach their children to pray. Recently a boy, eight years old, and from a home where the father and mother were professing Christians and active in church work, and yet this boy, eight years old, told his Sunday-school teacher that he had never been taught even the simple prayer, “now I lay me down to sleep.” Pathetic you say. It’s a crime! Before God such parents are guilty of soul negligence, and the church of the future will lay the responsibility for Christian nurture largely at the door of the home. The home cannot shift all this responsibility to the Sunday-school. If the youth are to be won to Christ and the Church, Christian parents absolutely must accept their responsibility and create a wholesome religious atmosphere in the home. Religion should be a topic of conversation in the family circle the same as education, industry, politics, etc. But above all it must be practiced in all the family relationships and in the various relationships of life—for religion is caught as well as taught.

Educational evangelism can never be carried out in its fullest possibilities without the enthusiastic and consistent co-operation of the home. The co-operation of the Christian parents must be secured. No parent can afford to be so busy with the material interests of the home as to neglect the moral and spiritual development of his child. I do not contend that the old

type of family altar should be set up in every home. But I am thoroughly convinced that unless a family altar of some kind is established in every Christian home, the Church will suffer and the spiritual welfare of the youth will be neglected. The family altar may be a different piece of furniture in the modern home than what it used to be in the homes of our parents. It will not require that a full chapter of the Bible be read each time and that the prayer shall be long and tedious. But it will require that at some stated time each day the members of the home gather together in humble acknowledgment that God is the author of life and the giver of every good and perfect gift. And together the members of the home should seek divine strength and guidance.

Whether or not a home is to have family worship all depends where the parents place their chief emphasis in life. They have time to read the daily paper, review the stock markets, and laugh over the comic page. Certainly no sincere Christian father or mother would contend, if they had time for these things, that they do not have time to read from God's Word. Consistent parents put first things first. If they believe that the Bible is of first importance as a book of information and inspiration they will not neglect reading it because of lack of time, and then spend time in reading inferior "stuff." I use the word "stuff" advisedly. If we attach the importance to religion which every Christian should, we will make room for religious instruction in our home program.

The Sunday-school can never be a substitute for what the home should provide in religious training. But rather the Sunday-school merely supplements the instruction of the home. The brief half hour once a week given by the Sunday-school for definite religious instruction can never meet the child's needs. But if the home will do its part, and then the Sunday-school and church do their part, the youth will have a fair chance in life for proper religious and moral development.

To this end every Sunday-school teacher should realize that the ultimate objective in the task of religious education is to win the child for Christ and the church. Religious education is definite evangelistic propaganda of the highest type. The idea prevailing a generation ago that the objective in religious education was merely to impart the facts of the lesson was not sufficient to meet the needs. Religious education must deal with ideals as well as with ideas. The other extreme which was common a generation ago among some Sunday-school teachers was to ignore the importance of the subject matter in the lesson, and because of want of information the teacher spent the lesson period in exhortation. This extreme of merely exhorting the children to come to Jesus is equally as unworthy of the Sunday-school teacher as the other extreme of merely presenting the bare facts of the lesson, giving no life issue, and having no definite objective touching the child's relation and duty to God.

The fundamental principle of pedagogy is that the teacher shall have a definite objective in mind, and shall know in detail every step that must be taken in order to realize the objective. Thus the definite objective in the work of every Sunday-school teacher should be to win the pupils for Christ, and then to equip them with knowledge and inspiration for service. Both the direct method and the indirect method of approach should be used in winning the youth to life allegiance to Christ. A knowledge of Child psychology will help the teacher, but it is not absolutely essential. A knowledge of boys and girls is even more important, and a sincere love for the youth is the most important of all.

Time was when the church looked upon the youth as a problem. Later the youth was considered a field of opportunity. But the church in the future will look upon the youth as a force. The church of the future will make greater and ever greater use of this force, this enthusiasm, this life momentum. The child is the hope of the church and of the world. And because we are coming to appreciate this fact, the future of the church of our Lord was never brighter, never more hopeful. The fact that the church has failed in the past to recognize its evangelistic opportunity among the youth accounts for the appalling failure of the church in winning the boys and girls for Christ.

Statistics reveal the important fact which is familiar to all that eighty-three percent of the members of

the church come through the Sunday-school. And yet statistisc also reveal the perfectly alarming fact that seventy percent of those in the Sunday-school are lost to the church. Three out of every four boys in our Sunday-schools are lost from the Senior and Young People's divisions. Something has been radically wrong with a system that permitted such losses. If a business concern lost three out of every four dollars invested it would be considered a complete failure.

The trouble has been that the churches have not recognized the children as being an asset to the Kingdom but have thought of them as being a liability. In looking after the spiritual interests of the adults, the spiritual interests of the child have been overlooked. Busy here and there in seeking to win the adults to Christ and the church, the youth have been allowed to slip away from the influence of the church and altogether too often have been lost to the Kingdom for years, if not for all time. Think of it—seventy percent of the boys and girls who enter the Sunday-school are lost to the church somewhere along the line, all because of one of three or of all three reasons,—the home has not given its sympathetic co-operation by sustaining a wholesome religious environment and by parental instruction in religion and morals, or because the Sunday-school has not had a definite evangelistic objective in its program of religious education, or because of lack of “sympathetic appreciation of the child's life in its moral and religious development.” In short the failure has been due to the fact

that the need of the child has not been the recognized law of the Kingdom, but rather the whims and fancies of the adults have determined the program of the church. Child evangelism demands that the need of the child shall always be the law of the church and of the Sunday-school.

You cannot educate a child into the Kingdom of God any more than you can educate him into any other relationship in life. But you can train him so that the choice of the Christian life will be perfectly natural for him. Life itself is a series of choices. Evangelism insists that these choices by the child may be a progression of choices for the good, and that by proper religious training in the home and in the Sunday-school the child can make the supreme choice of life, the choice of its Savior and its God without any revolutionary experience in its life. The child does not have first to decide for the bad in order later to decide for the good. Religious education is not a substitute for definite religious experience, but is rather an aid to the realization of the definite religious experience. It makes it easier for the child to decide for the good, for God, and for a life of loving service to humanity in the name of the Lord Christ. Call this decision what you will—the experience is the same,—the experiencing of religion. Some call it conversion, some call it the religious unfoldment, some call it a spiritual birth. It is not the name but the experience that is of vital importance,—namely for the child to pledge allegiance to Christ's way of living.

By example and precept, by instruction and devotion, the home and the church can so magnify and exalt the Lord Christ that the youth will experience a resistless longing to be an avowed follower of Jesus Christ. And following Jesus is the sum total of Christianity.

A mother of four boys was deeply grieved because the youngest of the four, a lad of sixteen years, made known to her that he was going to follow the example of his other three brothers and become a sailor upon the high seas. She had hoped that he would remain at home and be her stay and support in her old age. She could not understand why she should give her four sons to a life on the treacherous seas. But when the time came for the boy to leave home she bade him an affectionate farewell as he with his little bag of personal effects, started down to the harbor to board the great ship on which he was to work. With a sad heart the mother went to the little bedroom where all four of the boys had slept, and as she sat upon the side of the bed she tried to think why it was that all her boys should have decided for a life on the sea.

As she raised her eyes to the wall, she saw the large oil painting, a picture of a great ship plowing its way through the dashing waves. And then it dawned upon her that from babyhood the picture in the boys' room had called to them daily. Every night before they went to sleep and every morning when they awoke they saw that picture of the ship at sea. And it filled their young hearts with the desire to spend their lives

upon the surging deep. The constant impression of the picture upon their minds did the work.

And this is the opportunity of the parents and Sunday-school teachers to hold the life of Jesus up before the boys and girls in such a winsome and wholesome way that they will naturally decide for a life of purity, of goodness, and of usefulness.

Deciding for Christ should be thought of as a normal experience and not as an abnormal experience. And if the life and character of Jesus is held up before the youth consistently they will want Him.

A boy of ten years while playing upon the street was accidentally run over by an auto. When they took him to the hospital, the physicians and nurses despaired of his life. The little fellow kept calling, "I want the man." The nurse sent for his father. The father came, and stood by the boy's side, but the lad shook his head, saying, "I want the man." They sent for the lad's Sunday-school teacher, a young man of fine character who had always exalted the life of Christ before the boys in his class. The Sunday-school teacher quickly came and tried to bring cheer to the little fellow. The lad shook his head again and said, "I want the man." They then sent for the doctor who came and simply stood by the boy's side, as there was nothing more he could do. The lad looked at him, and then faintly shook his head saying, "No, I want the man, the man with the crown of thorns on his head."

The character of Jesus had been held up before the boy in his home and in his Sunday-school class in such beauty and simplicity that when the crisis came to his young life it was only natural for him to want "the man with the crown of thorns on his head."

The evangelism of the youth, or educational evangelism challenges the mothers and fathers, the Sunday-school teachers and pastors so to hold up the life of Jesus before the child in example and in teaching from the Kindergarten, on up through the Beginners, the Primary, and the Junior departments so that by the time or before the time the child comes to the Intermediate department he will have voiced the desire of his heart by pledging allegiance for life to "the Man with the crown of thorns upon his head."

To thus win the boys and girls for Christ and the Church is the triumph supreme,—the triumph of The Evangelism of Youth. This is the task of the Church of the living God, and *the supreme objective in religious education.*

**THE CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
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